FROM THE NTC:

OPFOR Counterreconnaissance At the National Training Center

by Captain Richard Randazzo

The success or failure of most National Training Center battles is determined long before the main combat forces leave the line of departure. An attacking force with good intelligence can effectively plan and maintain the initiative, while a poor intelligence effort often leads to haphazard planning and a blind, ineffective attack. With this in mind, the OPFOR places a fundamental emphasis on detecting and destroying the attacker's reconnaissance effort. This article will describe how the OPFOR conducts effective counterreconnaissance screens in order to provide ideas for BLUFOR commanders to refine the execution of their own counterreconnaissance missions, and to provide BLUFOR commanders with some techniques to defeat the OPFOR screen line when attacking. This article addresses each element of the Battlefield Operating Systems (BOS) and explains their synchronization within the OPFOR Motorized Rifle Battalion (MRB) counterreconnaissance effort.

Situation

Once a mission is received, the MRB commander, the MRB executive officer (XO), and the Motorized Rifle Regiment (MRR) scout platoon leader, will conduct a combined map reconnaissance to determine possible scout avenues of approach, possible support-by-fire positions, probable kill sacks, and positions for OPFOR vehicles. If time permits, the MRB commander, executive officer, and scout platoon leader will conduct a joint area reconnaissance to confirm or deny their initial map assessment. Once this initial planning stage is complete, and his intent for the counterreconnaissance battle is fully understood, the MRB commander will focus on preparing the main defense, and the MRB XO will assume responsibility for the counterrecon fight.

During the subsequent operations order, the MRB XO will issue the concept and intent of the counterreconnaissance operation, including proposed locations, requirements for closing lanes in obstacle belts, and guidance for patrolling obstacle belts. The scout platoon leader will then brief his vehicle locations, which positioned themselves after the initial planning session, providing eight-digit grid locations, as well as task and purpose for each scout vehicle. He will also provide the scout platoon radio frequencies, engagement and disengagement criteria, and any newly gathered intelligence.

The MRB XO will generally position the Counterreconnaissance Patrol (CRP), consisting of three BMP2s and two BRDMs, in ambush positions along probable mounted infiltration routes 800 to 1,000 meters in front of the MRB tactical obstacle belt. The XO will also incorporate AT-5 and air defense systems into the MRB counterreconnaissance plan, placing them on key terrain near the MRB reserve/quick reactionary force. In addition to the MRB assets positioned by the MRB XO, each MRC will position its own individual screen line consisting of one T-80 tank and two BMPs 100-200 meters behind the tactical obstacle belt in the main defensive area.

The MRB creates a substantial four-belt counterreconnaissance screen with scouts, CRP vehicles, MRC screens, and AT-5s in position. Although each of these counterreconnaissance forces must also prepare defensive positions for the main battle, the OPFOR commander understands that denying enemy reconnaissance is the key to victory, and therefore, that is where he weights his defensive effort.

Command and Control

The MRB XO commands and controls the counterreconnaissance fight from his BRDM. This gives him the flexibility to quickly reposition himself and provides better communications than a tracked vehicle. The enhanced communication proves vital to the XO as he must monitor both the scout's intelligence net and the MRB command net. As scouts send reports on the intelligence net, the MRB XO coordinates between the four counterreconnaissance belts on the command net, ensuring positive hand-off of enemy forces. If necessary, the XO will instruct the scout platoon to coordinate directly with a killer team, but he will continue to monitor and control the entire effort. All vehicles send spot reports on the command net to ensure attachments monitor the proceedings, but all engagements occur on internal frequencies.

To further facilitate command and control, the XO issues a specific task and purpose to each belt of the counterreconnaissance effort. Scouts are the forward eyes and identify and report approaching enemy vehicles, engaging the enemy only in self defense. Scouts will maintain visual contact with enemy vehicles until positive hand off occurs with the CRP or MRC screening forces. The CRP assumes responsibility of the enemy forces from the scouts and if it is capable, destroys them. If the force is too strong for the CRP, it will pass the enemy back to the tanks in the MRC screen line. The MRC screen line will then engage to destroy the enemy force before it locates the defense's main obstacle belt.

Positive hand-off between each reconnaissance belt is essential to help eliminate fratricide. Therefore, the OPFOR will conduct detailed counterreconnaissance rehearsals at the MRB, MRC, and MRP levels. These rehearsals stress the initial identification of the enemy vehicle and the tracking of that vehicle until it is destroyed.

Fire Support

During the planning process, the XO and the scout platoon leader plan illumination and HE targets. As the scouts and

CRP deploy following the initial planning process, they will confirm or adjust each target. They will also place VS-17 panels with chemical lights at the grid of each artillery target to further facilitate effective calls for fire.

Once the counterreconnaissance battle begins, the scouts will utilize illumination rounds to provide the CRP easy visual identification of enemy forces. If enemy forces stop, the scouts will destroy them with indirect fires, adjusting from either VS17 panels or chemical light TRPs.

Intelligence

The scout platoon, which consists of vismod BRDMs, BMPs, RKHs, GSRs and ERPs, deploys throughout the depth of sector. It usually sends two BRDMs and two RKHs to attempt identification of the enemy's line of departure prior to the attack. It positions the remaining forces along key terrain covering mounted and dismounted avenues of approach. To maximize the reconnaissance effort and ensure redundancy, each vehicle will also position a two-man dismounted observation post. Scout BMPs generally block mounted avenues of approach or are incorporated into the MRBs counterreconnaissance fight.

Air Defense

Dismounted SA-14 teams are employed on the high ground along the flanks of the main defensive area. Although they position themselves along the probable air mobility corridors, the scout platoon often identifies enemy air assets first; therefore, the ADA SA-14 teams must monitor the intelligence net to ensure they have a common view of the battle with the scouts. The air defense BRDMs will clear possible enemy landing zones and are quickly assimilated into the quick-reaction force/reserve.

Mobility/Countermobility

Both scouts and CRP vehicles emplace protective obstacles to aid in the destruction and detection of the enemy. Wire and mines are usually employed on the OPFOR side of an intervisibility line (IV) or after a turn on a single vehicle trail. Like the main obstacle belt, locations of the protective minefields must be reported higher and incorporated into the MRB's obstacle plan. Additionally, boulders and tank ditches are sometimes used to block the small avenues of approach along the flanks. When obstacles are utilized, either a scout BMP or a CRP BMP will overwatch the obstacle.

Maneuver

As defensive preparations begin, the MRB commander allocates one third of each MRC's combat power into the MRB's third counterreconnaissance line. Although substantial forces are already forward (scouts, CRP) his maneuver forces must still dig in.

During daylight, one MRP from each MRC will conduct the counterreconnaissance screen while the other MRPs prepare their defensive positions. The screening MRP will identify the CRP vehicles to its front and any friendly scout platoon positions along its flanks. The BMPs dismount their crews and conduct dismounted patrols of high ground that can observe their battle positions.

During limited visibility, the positioning of the MRP screening force becomes critical as battle hand-off between the CRP becomes more difficult. Each MRC commander positions his screening force where it can still observe main avenues of approach, but during limited visibility, he also ensures it possesses a clear hand-off from the CRP vehicles. If his sector includes a flank, MRC commanders will reinforce that area, placing two vehicles in a "backstop" position behind the existing CRP vehicle. The third MRP vehicle is responsible for the remainder of the sector and ties in with the flank MRP. All three MRCs will array in this format.

Backstopping the MRP screen lines are the AT-5 assets and the MRB reserve. Usually the OPFOR will place one or two AT-5s on a key piece of terrain to help identify any penetrating enemy vehicles with their thermal sights. The MRB reserve, made up of the MRB commander's tank and BMPs and BRDMs from the MRB, is a flexible force which reacts quickly to any penetrations of the screen line and to any threats in the rear or flanks.

Recommendations

The OPFOR is successful during the counterreconnaissance fight primarily because they echelon their counterreconnaissance forces. Unlike the BLUFOR, the OPFOR involves the entire battalion in the counterreconnaissance fight, therefore increasing the probability of detecting infiltrating forces. The four-echelon structure allows the OPFOR the flexibility to reinforce high-speed avenues of approach without risking other areas.

A second key to the OPFOR's success is centralized command and control. Having one commander who is responsible for the entire counterreconnaissance fight ensures that, not only is the mission planned, rehearsed, and executed, but it is also synchronized at the MRB level and includes all BOS elements.

The OPFOR will usually position the majority of its vehicles to cover the flanks, as they are the most likely infiltration routes leading into a sector. Therefore, "a way" the BLUFOR commander may penetrate an OPFOR screen line would be to infiltrate his scouts down the center of the defender's sector while a tank company attacks one flank. Although the terrain in the center is often open, and may not be conducive to unobserved movement, the BLUFOR will gain the element of surprise where the OPFOR is the weakest. The tank company should provide enough distraction to allow the scouts to penetrate the screen line quickly before they are detected. To improve chances of success in the center sector, scouts should also attempt to infiltrate dismounted.

A second technique to penetrate an OPFOR screenline would be to hold the LD times of infiltrating scouts until after 0200 hours. Although this would not guarantee the OPFOR is asleep, it would increase the chances of being successful.

Conclusion

The OPFOR allocates over 30 vehicles to detect and destroy enemy reconnaissance attempting to penetrate their defenses. Their four-echelon defense is very successful in destroying the enemy's reconnaissance effort. By preventing the BLUFOR attackers from acquiring the knowledge required to achieve success, the OPFOR consistently achieves decisive defensive victories.

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